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The situation in Central America: procedures for the establishment of a firm and lasting peace and progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development

Letter dated 10 November 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Honduras to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

As Acting President of the Central American Integration System, I have the honour to attach the Declaration of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Central American Presidents, held in the Republic of El Salvador on Monday, 9 November 1998 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Hugo **Noé-Pino**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Joint Declaration of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Central American Presidents, adopted in Comalapa, El Salvador on 9 November 1998

We, the Central American Presidents, are in mourning. We are living through one of the most profound human, social, environmental and economic tragedies in our history, as a result of the devastating effects of Hurricane Mitch.

We, the Presidents of the Republics of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, on behalf of the President, are therefore holding this Extraordinary Meeting at the El Salvador International Airport on 9 November 1998 to take joint decisions to cope with the disasters caused by the hurricane in this region.

Our first words are to express our consternation at the loss of thousands of human lives, bringing so much pain and suffering to the Central American family. A spirit of solidarity unites us, especially with the two most seriously affected countries, namely, Honduras – which has felt the impact throughout its territory – and Nicaragua.

The dimensions of this tragedy are threatening the region's future. We Central Americans stand united before our peoples and the world in facing the magnitude of the disaster.

Central America has been making a concerted effort to consolidate democracy and sustainable development in order to improve the quality of the lives of all its inhabitants.

The major advances we have made in the region indicate that the development model we have been following is appropriate and will ensure the healthy, sustained growth of our economies.

However, the impact of the disasters caused by Hurricane Mitch will require the region to make a concerted and extraordinary effort to preserve the progress already achieved and increase the pace of our economic and social development.

We draw attention to the fact that the devastating effects of this natural phenomenon on the region have varied in intensity from country to country, and we therefore consider that cooperation should be given in direct proportion to the reconstruction and development needs of each country.

Central America is making enormous efforts to meet the people's most basic needs during this first phase of the emergency, and we thank the international community for its solidarity, understanding and support.

It is essential to proceed immediately to an evaluation of the human, economic, social and environmental impact, which would include a study of how to rebuild the physical infrastructure and rehabilitate the production apparatus.

We call on the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, on an urgent basis, to work with the countries of the region on elaborating a Central American Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Plan, with the cooperation of the Latin American Programme on Competitiveness and Sustainable Development of the Central American Institute for Business Administration, financed by the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, with the participation of the Central American Integration System. The

magnitude of the disaster exceeds Central America's capacity to deal with the crisis, and it will need large-scale multinational support beyond the emergency stage.

We also call for the international community's solidarity in convening an Emergency Regional Advisory Group to provide Central America with the financial resources it needs to implement this Plan, in accordance with the damage suffered by each country. This Group would include the highest officials of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Group of Seven, the European Union and the United Nations.

The economic impact of the disaster and the resource requirements for reconstruction will also entail, besides the management of debt cancellation for Honduras and Nicaragua, which all Central Americans support, an extraordinary contribution from the international community so that we may obtain fresh resources.

Under these circumstances, Central America also needs the international community's support in the form of open access of all our export products to their markets, as a contribution to economic recovery and job creation. The commitment of the United States of America to negotiate a free trade agreement with Central America and an immediate expansion of the benefits of the Caribbean Basin Initiative to bring it to the same level as the North American Free Trade Agreement are essential. We also call on the European Union to eliminate tariffs and duties that restrict the import of agricultural and industrial exports from Central America.

This disastrous situation has caused an interruption of intraregional trade and will require urgent measures to reactivate it, since such trade has strategic priority for the Central American countries, in view of its great importance to our economies; we therefore commit ourselves to the task of immediately rebuilding the road infrastructure which unites us.

We also appeal to the international community for understanding in respect of the granting of a general amnesty to undocumented Central American immigrants currently residing in a number of countries so as to prevent their deportation, which would greatly aggravate the present situation in our countries.

We instruct the councils of sectoral ministers to confront the grave problems arising from the disaster by working together, especially in the areas of health, agriculture, environment and the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure.

We also instruct our Governors with the Central American Bank for Economic Integration to proceed immediately to promote the following actions:

- To make a significant donation to the Central American countries for the rebuilding of the road network which unites Central America;
- To reprogramme the available amounts to meet the current needs of our countries;
- To adopt streamlined, flexible policies for approving new credits for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Central America and devise arrangements for obtaining additional resources to be allocated in proportion to the damage suffered by each country;
- To take the necessary steps for the immediate issue of bonds, the proceeds of which would be used to fund the Central American Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Plan, with the backing of the international financial institutions and friendly countries;
- To consider the possibility of declaring a moratorium on all the debts of the most seriously affected countries, where possible.

The twentieth summit meeting of the Presidents was to be devoted to the Central American region's vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change. Since that meeting has been postponed because of the emergency, we instruct the competent authorities to continue the work they have been doing on this matter. There is a need to devise mechanisms for the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters, with the full participation of the communities involved.

Even as we address the most urgent humanitarian problems in the affected population, we must also adopt a medium- and long-term strategy to bring about the reconstruction of Central America as a stronger and more modern region, one that offers more and better opportunities for trade and investment. The Central American people will be the beneficiaries of this new stage in the integration process which we are promoting.

In these difficult times, we share with our peoples a message of encouragement and hope, trusting that through our own efforts and sacrifices, together with the generous support of the international community, Central America will emerge strengthened in its desire for integration, solidarity and development.

We, the Presidents of Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala acknowledge the initiative of the President of El Salvador to convene this meeting in his country, and we express our thanks for the hospitality we have received, which contributed to the success of the meeting.

Miguel Ángel **Rodríguez Echeverría**
President of the Republic of Costa Rica

Armando **Calderón Sol**
President of the Republic of El Salvador

Carlos R. **Flores F.**
President of the Republic of Honduras

Arnoldo **Alemán Lacayo**
President of the Republic of Nicaragua

Eduardo **Stein Barillas**
Minister for Foreign Affairs
representing the President of the Republic of Guatemala